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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SUDAN MARKS WORLD AIDS DAY

REF: State 217347

1. On December 1, Sudan marked the occasion of World AIDS Day with the Khartoum launch of the Global Campaign "Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS" at Friendship Hall. Sponsored by the Ministry of Health, the Sudan National AIDS Program, UNAIDS, and UNICEF, the event featured remarks by First Lady Widad Babiker, who called for mobilization of national and international efforts to protect children from AIDS. She also noted that she would sponsor efforts to combat AIDS through a forum of African first ladies during the African Union Summit to be held in Khartoum on January 23 - 24.

2. Minister of Health Tabitha Sokaya affirmed the government's combating of AIDS through its five-year action plan, which President Bashir signed last year. UNAIDS Program Coordinator Musa Bungudu stated that Sudan had the highest rate of HIV infection in North Africa and the Middle East. He called for the following actions:

-- While the Sudan National AIDS Program is doing well with limited resources, the challenges it faces are enormous and require that its financial, human, and logistical resources be increased;

-- Sudan's AIDS response is fortunately of a multisectoral nature, including both the public and private sector; they need adequate funds and other resources to strengthen their response;

-- People living with HIV/AIDS are stigmatized in many ways in Sudan; they require recognition and support; and

-- Finally, the First Lady is called on to serve as patron for Sudan's response to HIV/AIDS.

3. The event, and World AIDS Day in general, received extensive media coverage. More than one thousand people attended the event, including hundreds of local school children.

4. Comment: Post used reftel text in a Dec 1 press release on HIV/AIDS awareness and related USG activities. Post will review potential avenues of support for the AU First Ladies Forum on HIV/AIDS to take place in Khartoum during the January 23 - 24, 2006 AU Summit in Khartoum.

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